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OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY¹

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This volume appeared a little over a year ago. Students looked forward to its appearance with much expectation. Its author had done great things. It was known that the subject of these lectures had been the "favorite study" of Professor Davidson for forty years. Moreover, it is this series of lectures, given with modifications year after year to theological students, that has in large measure brought about "the changed attitude of all the churches in Scotland to biblical science" within these last twenty years or so. The editor is right, therefore, in saying that, "apart from its intrinsic value as the work of a great scholar and thinker, this book must always occupy a unique place in the history of Scottish theology."

Is the book an important one? Does it meet our expectations? The writer of this review examined the book immediately upon its appearance, for the purpose of presenting it to the readers of the *Biblical World*. The result of this first reading was disappointing; so much so that, not wishing to say anything that was not commendatory, no statement has thus far been made. After a period, the writer has again studied the book more carefully, and especially to find out for himself the occasion of the disappointment which followed the first reading. As a matter of fact, the characteristics which before seemed weak and unsatisfactory now appear to represent that very strength which we all knew the author to possess. The thought was so simple in its presentation, the process of reasoning so straightforward and convincing, that it required a second examination to appreciate its value.

The striking characteristics are (1) this simplicity, which is indeed marvelous; (2) the absence of everything that savors of pretense or show of learning (note the editor's effort in the preface to explain the

¹ *Old Testament Prophecy*, by the late A. B. Davidson, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D., Professor of Hebrew, New College, Edinburgh; edited by J. A. Paterson, D.D., Professor of Hebrew, New College, Edinburgh. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

almost total absence of reference to, or quotation of, other authorities); (3) the purpose and plan of the lectures, viz., to open up a most intricate and delicate series of problems to persons who (*a*) have never given any considerable amount of thought to the subject, and (*b*) have thought along entirely wrong lines in so far as they have given it any attention. This is exactly the condition in which the young man comes to the theological seminary, not only in Scotland, but also in America.

The lectures, from a pedagogical point of view, are a work of art. The author had not studied in vain such Old Testament prophets as Amos and Hosea. He had not only imbibed their thought and spirit; he had adopted their consummate method. No more skilful presentation of the great Isaianic question (pp. 242–62) to novices in biblical science was ever made. No more adroit handling of that much-abused term “higher criticism” was ever exhibited. Listen to him: “All criticism is really an application of the principles of common sense by a person provided with the requisite knowledge of facts (p. 243);” and again: “all that sound criticism implies, whether higher or lower, is a competent knowledge of the facts, good judgment, and perhaps a certain tact and instinctive sense, which only great familiarity with language and style can supply.”

His general position is openly and strongly that of the historical school; but he omits the unnecessary detail which many writers, over-influenced by the German method of presentation, feel compelled to include. The absence of all this was at first disturbing; but when a truer understanding of his design was obtained, what before had seemed a shortcoming now came to be indeed an evidence of superiority.

The student of prophecy will find an exposition, of the clearest kind, of that difficult question of the *fulfilment* of prophecy relating to the Jews, with a careful classification of the various views entertained by different schools of opinion (pp. 468–500). Nothing can be more satisfactory than his description of the prophetic style, and his showing that

the true way to regard prophecy is to accept it literally as the meaning of the prophet—the only meaning which in his time he could have—but to say, as to fulfilment, that the form of the Kingdom of God is now altered, and altered

finally, never to return to its old form; and so fulfilment will not take place in the form of the prediction, but in an altered form; but still the truth of the prophecy will, no doubt, be realized.

To some students of prophecy it will appear that Professor Davidson has not distributed his material in due proportion, giving as he does so much space to the times which really preceded the rise of true prophetism. It may be thought, also, that so full a treatment of "Types and Symbols" (pp. 193-244) was not needed in a modern treatment of prophecy. In his classification of the prophets from Amos on, and in the summary which he gives of their teaching, it may be objected, not only that he seems to minimize the subject by thus throwing them all together, but also that he fails to bring out the distinctive position of each prophet in his relation to the others. Some, likewise, will hardly agree with him in certain details, e. g., in the treatment of Ps. 72 as having been written by Solomon (p. 281); and others, perhaps, will suggest that his very suggestive chapter on "The False Prophets" (pp. 285-308) should have contained a recognition of the first date of separation between true and false prophets in the wonderful episode of Micaiah ben Imlah (2 Kings 22:11 ff.). But in all this, we must remember, Professor Davidson is dealing with his subject having a certain class of persons in mind. This is not a treatise on Old Testament prophecy to be read by a few distinguished scholars in England, Germany, and America. It is a pedagogically constructed *opening up* of the problems of prophecy, for minds not accustomed to deal with the subject in a technical way, and for minds already filled, in so far as they are filled at all, with a good deal of real nonsense on the subject.

It is worth while to consider whether a body of lectures which has already performed so large a service to the cause of true religious education cannot in this published form accomplish results of great importance. This book should be used as a textbook in every theological seminary; it should be made the basis of work in ten thousand Bible classes. It is not too much to say that anyone who can listen intelligently to an average sermon can read just as intelligently this important work.

Does some man wish to know just what are the results of higher criticism when applied to prophecy? Let him read this book; and then let him form his estimate of the higher criticism.